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VERSES

BY

ALEXANDER NICOLSON, LL.D.

VERSES

BY

ALEXANDER NICOLSON, LL.D.

WITH MEMOIR

BY WALTER SMITH, D.D.

EDINBURGH: DAVID DOUGLAS

1893

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MEMOIR

ALEXANDER NICOLSON was perhaps as true a type of the Scottish Celt as this age has seen. Not that he was a pure Celt either, for there was a strain of Norse blood in him, as there is in many of the men of Skye and the Lews. But it had been so diluted in the course of time as to leave him practically as thorough a Highlander as ever rejoiced to speak the Gaelic tongue. Somehow the pure Celt is not a success in this life; not for want of abilities, not because he has not force, both mental and bodily, to hold his own with the best. But he is apt to be dreamy, to work by fits and starts, to fail in that persistency which alone secures its end. Perhaps,

indeed, he serves his real purpose when he adds a vein of poetry and fiery passion to some dull prosaic race, in which his individuality is lost. At least that has been suggested, and possibly it is not far wrong. Nicolson, with all his brilliant faculties—and I have known few men more richly gifted — was certainly not successful, except in winning many warm friends, and never alienating any of them. He drew back from the Church, where with his fine reverence he might have been a power. He tried literature, but did not make a name. He tried law, but did not win a practice, and became only a sheriff-substitute. Yet there are scores of commonplace prosperous lawyers and editors who have not half his intellect. It is a pity that the Norseman was not the dominant element in him; for the Norseman, even with ordinary gifts, commonly gets on very well, where the Celt, though greatly endowed, so often fails.

It is now nearly forty-five years since I first became acquainted with him. He was then a

bright young student entering the Divinity Hall of the Free Church, which I was about to leave. But his tall handsome figure, and his thoughtful face, not without a strong dash of humour in it, took my fancy, and we were drawn together more or less for the short time I remained. He had won distinguished honours in philosophy, and we older students were proud to have him among us. But he and I were soon parted, and though I heard of his journalisms and law studies, we never met for years, save once when we spent a bright happy Sunday in Arran together. He was then full of hope, but also rather sluggish; a pleasant companion among the hills and glens and mists, but evidently not a hard, at least not a steady worker. Perhaps he already felt that weak action of the heart which at last carried him off so suddenly. Perhaps it was only the Celtic lack of continuous energy. It was delightful to walk and talk with him, but one had doubts of his ever doing what it was clearly in him to do, if only he would

work with a will. He was then fighting with straitened circumstances, while I was burdened with a heavy sorrow; and his warm sympathy was helpful to me, whatever mine did for him. In later life we had occasion to meet often, and I never parted from him without a feeling of the big generous nature of the man, and the wealth of faculty that was in him, of which however probably little or no trace would soon be left, except only in the memory of those who knew him.

Some years ago he gave, somewhat reluctantly, a brief sketch of his life to the editor of a volume of selections from works of "The Minor Poets of Scotland." It is hardly worth reprinting as a whole, being as meagre as he could well make it. But I shall take the liberty of using it freely as the most reliable authority for the main facts of his story.

Nicolson was born at Usabost in Skye,—where his father had, I believe, a small property,—on the 27th of September 1827. There he got his early education privately, "under several excellent

tutors," which implies that the family circumstances must then have been tolerably easy. Scottish people do not keep private tutors, even in out-of-the-way places, unless they count at least among the minor gentry. From Usabost he came straight to the University of Edinburgh, where he followed the usual course of study, and took the degree of B.A. Afterwards he "received the honorary degree of M.A. in respect of services rendered as assistant to several of the Professors." He had been a distinguished student under Sir W. Hamilton, and during his illness Nicolson read his lectures and conducted his class. He filled the same post afterwards with Professor Macdougall, I believe. For a young man able to hold that position his friends naturally anticipated a brilliant career, and they were probably rather disappointed when it appeared that he aimed no higher than the humble position of a Free Church minister. That intention, however, did not hold long. He says that of all the Professors in New College "one only was

highly interesting to him, the unique and wonderful Rabbi Duncan." Ere long he gave up theology, thinking "the uniform of the esteemed Free Church, of which I am still a member, too strait for me." There is some reason to believe that a faint suspicion of heresy somehow attached to him, and drew the attention of strict college authorities, which he probably resented. Then he drifted for a season into literature, which was no doubt his real vocation, if the *res angusta domi* would have permitted it; for by this time his father was dead, and there was but scant provision for the widow and family. For a time, then, he acted "as one of the sub-editors of the 8th edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*," under Mr. Spencer Baynes, doing mere hodman's work of course, hardly discoverable now by the most industrious biographer, probably also not worth the search. Then he became "one of the staff of the *Edinburgh Guardian*, a short-lived paper of high literary character," conducted I think by the late

Mr. Dallas. For a year he "edited an advanced Liberal paper called the *Daily Express*," but though always a Liberal, he was never much of a politician, and had neither the special gifts nor the special training required for a successful journalist. What sort of work his graver articles were I do not know. But I can imagine his occasional *skits* were amusing enough, and that people missed them when the paper was at length merged in the *Caledonian Mercury*. At least, those letters which long afterwards appeared in the *Scotsman* during the Robertson Smith business, with the signature of M'Craw, had a rare felicity of humour in them. But a daily paper demands hard and constant work, and the Celt can work hard enough, but finds the constancy irksome.

In 1860 he was called to the Scottish Bar, and had now at last a distinct profession. But the Solicitors and Writers to the Signet fought very shy of him. It is said that they do not like advocates with literary tendencies; yet Jeffrey was a successful practitioner. It is also said that they keep their

business for their own sons and nephews and other kin, and there are some rather pathetic references to this in one of Nicolson's songs. I cannot tell what the real explanation may be, but one who had been an assistant professor and examiner in Philosophy, who was also a reporter for the *Scottish Jurist*, and subsequently its editor, might have naturally looked to get a share of the business before the Supreme Court; yet he did not. In some quarters it rushed in full tide, but for Nicolson it was always at the lowest ebb. Weaker, commoner men drank their fill, while there was not a drop to moisten his lips. Possibly he could never have been a great lawyer. But he never got the chance, for it is only by practice that one can be really learned in the law. The mere study of Stair and Erskine will hardly make an able jurist; and without a definite object one can scarcely read and remember endless decisions of court. So the years passed by in a monotonous pacing of the boards of "Parliament House," and reporting of cases for

the *Jurist*, but without a brief or any likely opportunity to show what mettle he was of. He was not alone, of course, in this experience. The Bar has always a number of idlers, voluntary or involuntary, some of them taking their fun, and others eating their hearts. But as a rule they can afford to be doing nothing; and unhappily that was not Nicolson's position. It was a hard lot, and soon became harder when the *Jurist* failed, and he lost the £100 a year which it had brought him. This he deplores in a poem from which I may quote a verse or two.

"Mourn for the *Jurist*,
Fount of legal lore the purest;
Mourn for the *Jurist*
Whom we shall see no more.

"Mourn for the *Jurist*
That wrought for us and bled for us;
Mourn for the *Jurist*
That eked our little store.

"For five and forty years it fought,
Nor bated of its strength a jot,
And ne'er by us should be forgot
The help it gave to boil the pot.

"O *Scottish Jurist!*
My heart is sad this night for thee,
Though many a time in summer's prime
I counted thee a bore."

Outside his profession he got some occasional work, it is true, and did it faithfully. As I have already said, he was examiner in Philosophy for a while. For three years also he was examiner of the Registers of Births etc., in Edinburgh and the neighbouring counties. In 1865 he was appointed Assistant Commissioner by the Scottish Education Commission, which needed some one who understood Gaelic. "In that capacity he visited nearly all the inhabited Western Isles and inspected their schools," not without good results to them, and great enjoyment to himself, for his heart was always in the Highlands, and more particularly the island part of them. He must have seen at that time the wretched condition of the crofters, and I know that he felt their miseries keenly. But he was not an inventive politician, and did not take the initiative

in any proposal to redress their grievances. In after years, indeed, he was one of the Commissioners, under Lord Napier, who inquired into the Crofter question, and he took a lively interest in the matter. But then also it may be questioned whether his enjoyment in sailing from island to island, and watching the mists and the sunsets, was not quite as strong as his wish to get Parliament to legislate on their behalf. His was the artistic, rather than the practical, temperament; and the sight of the squalidest "black houses" in Lews would not have prevented him from singing a pleasant song in the evening. Not that he did not sympathise with those poor folk; but he knew that in spite of their poverty, there was not a little cheerful piety in their homes.

At last, in 1872, despairing of getting any practice at the Bar, he accepted the office of steward-substitute of the stewartry of Kirkcudbright, now known as the sheriff-substitute of that county. It was not a very lucrative office, and he had two

sisters, and four nieces to maintain and educate. The income was considerably increased subsequently by the addition of Wigtownshire to his shrievalty, but that implied also considerable increase of labour, early rising on certain days, and tedious railway journeys. He complained a good deal of this, for he was now grown rather corpulent, which added to his constitutional indolence.

About this time the Celtic Chair in the University was endowed by the enthusiasm and energy of Professor Blackie. It had been first suggested by Nicolson and the late distinguished Gaelic scholar, the Rev. Dr. MacLauchlan. But it needed another kind of man to realise their idea. Almost every one interested in the chair expected that Nicolson would be its first incumbent, and Professor Blackie urged him to accept it. If he could have continued in his sheriffdom he would have done so. But that was found to be impossible, and he shrank from giving up a post from which he might retire by and by with a pension such as he could hardly

hope to earn as a professor. In the end he regretted greatly that he had declined the chair, for which he had unique qualifications, especially as the change which he was led ere long to make was to a post for which, it turned out, he was very poorly qualified.

His friends—of whom he had many—did not well know what to advise when he had an offer to exchange Kirkcudbright for Greenock. In the former, life was rather dull and solitary. He had little or no intellectual companionship. The very atmosphere was sleepy. It was mere village life, without interest, without stimulus, without privacy too. In such a place he seemed to be wasted. Little as he had done before to justify the high opinion of those who knew and loved him, he had done still less since he went to the shores of the Solway, and the banks of the Dee and the Ken. Perhaps Greenock might rouse him to put forth his energies. The very law business there would call for mental activity. He could hardly sleep away his time in such a centre of manifold activities; and he was

within sight of the hills and lochs which would remind him of his beloved Skye. We all thought the change might be good for him, and we never were more mistaken in our lives. Perhaps by this time he had lost what power of steady application he ever had. Certainly commercial law, too, which was specially needed in Greenock, was quite new to him, and he found it difficult to make up his mind about the questions submitted to his judgment. He had not been long in the sugar metropolis ere murmurs were heard about arrears of court business, and discontent among agents and clients. Things evidently were not going well. When one met him he was still as sweet-tempered and pleasant as ever, but not so happy. There was a shadow on his face, which was only partly removed even when he talked of his beloved Skye. Would Skye have been a better place for him than Greenock? I do not know. I doubt it, unless he had been free just to roam about its glens and lochs and hills, and drop into its cottages, or pay

a visit to its manses. We could not see it, of course, but his working day was drawing to an end. Probably he himself felt the failure of vital energy even thus early. He had had mysterious fainting fits, not natural to a man of his apparent strength. Doctors, seemingly, did not make much of them, yet they were strange in one of his gigantic build. Ere long, therefore, it seemed best that he should retire from active work altogether, having earned a right to a pension by some twenty years' service. Very glad were all his friends in Edinburgh to think of having him back among them again, and not without hope that now, at last, he would have leisure and freedom from anxiety to do something which would justify their high estimate of his powers. But it was not to be. Some of us tried hard to stir him up at least to polish the rough and careless work which had served to amuse a company of friends, but was not fit for larger publicity. Some of us hoped even that he might be persuaded to settle down to some bit of strenuous work alto-

gether new. None of us doubted that he could do almost anything he set himself resolutely to accomplish. But the days passed in lethargy, and the evenings in pleasant society. It soon appeared all too clear, that the leisure had come too late. The springs might not be quite dried up, but they were not strong enough to flow into a stream. The ambition was dead. "Carlyle's stern doctrine (not practice)," he says, "long ago impressed me with the conviction that there are duties much more imperative than the writing of books,"—which is quite true no doubt, only Nicolson had not done those other duties very energetically, and this last he might have done to the profit of the world. The only books he ever published were *A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs* and *A Life of the late Adam Black*. The former is, I suppose, a pretty complete gathering of Celtic proverbial sayings; but they are not compared with other national proverbs so as to indicate the peculiarities of the Highland ones. The latter book begins well and is full of

interest for the first half of the volume. After that, when the struggle of the young bibliopole is done, Nicolson seems to have felt as if he had had enough of it, and could not throw any interest into the successful Publisher, Provost, and Member of Parliament, who wielded so large and so long an influence over the Edinburgh Whigs. This biography will not perpetuate the memory of the excellent Adam Black. Nicolson's heart was not in the work. It was a task he had undertaken, and as a task it was done, after lying by for a good many years. He also edited a volume called *Edinburgh Essays*, written by a number of his friends connected with the University. It made a little stir at the time, but has long since gone to oblivion, and Nicolson's editorial functions in connection with it appear to have been of the meagrest. The only other literary work I find him concerned with, except occasional articles in *Good Words* and newspaper reviews, is the new edition of the Gaelic Bible, at which he wrought along with Pro-

fessor M'Kinnon. For aught I can tell, that may have been the biggest work of his life, for he knew both Greek and Gaelic, if Hebrew lay outside his ken. We will hope that it has proved a boon to the pious Celts beyond the Grampians, but for the rest of the world it was pretty much "Love's labour lost."

He concludes his brief autobiographical sketch with these words, "I would rather be remembered as the composer of one good song, than as the writer of many respectable and superfluous books." This desire of his has not remained ungratified. One genuine good song he has written, besides some others which are respectable and not superfluous. A bright breezy ditty is "The beautiful Isles of Greece," and it was good to hear him sing it. "The British Ass" has received the imprimatur of the great Association for which it was written, and is sung, I have been told, every year at the dinner of the philosophical "Red Lions." There is no march so delights the Scottish Brigade of the British

army as "Agus O, Mhórag!" But the triumph of his verse is the exquisite

> "My heart is yearning for thee, O Skye!
> Dearest of islands!"

which breathes throughout the sweet pure air of the Coolins by the sea. I would give a good deal to have written that song,—to have been capable of writing it. Many a time I have felt my eyes grow dim as he sang it; and the last time not less than the first. It is, indeed, a very scanty wreath we are able to lay on his grave, but this one rich blossom will perfume all the rest, and make them welcome to many. He left a good deal of MS., but in such a rough state that nothing could be made of it—songs which were the pastime of a merry evening, verses which were memorials of happy excursions, pleasant enough for friends at the time, useless for any other purpose. He had printed also occasional articles in various magazines, mostly about Skye; but there is a touch of the guide-book in them, with only here and there something that cries out of the

depths of his soul. This little book is all we have to show for all we once expected; and how slim it is for a man of his size!

It was pleasant for his friends to have him back among them in these last days, though they did not see so much of him as they could have wished. No one was more welcome at the dinner-table, or when he chanced to drop in of an evening. Yet the old fire no longer burned in him as of old. Doubtless Edinburgh held a good many ghosts for him. His old friend, Alexander Smith, was no longer there to rhapsodise with him about Blaven and Scoor-na-Gillian, and recall pleasant days in the little inn at Sligachan. Veitch too was gone, with his keen-witted criticism and endless stores of Greek; a walking dictionary, perhaps, rather than a man of large learning, yet withal a bright companion. The other Veitch, long his friend and comrade in philosophy and literature, was in Glasgow, a successful Professor of Logic. Possibly the memory of such old friends somewhat saddened

his latter days. Still more likely, that weak action of the heart to which I have already alluded, had its depressing influence. He knew of it; but he never spoke of it, and none of us suspected it till the sad end came. The night before he had passed at one of those big tea-meetings where Highlanders congregate annually, and sing Gaelic songs, and listen to English speeches. Next morning, the 13th of January 1893, sitting chatting over his coffee with one of his nieces, suddenly "his countenance changed," and he passed into the great unknown.

In presenting this selection from his MSS., at the request of those who knew and loved him, I have had in some cases to use editorial freedoms which I would have gladly avoided if I could. Those who know the originals will not hesitate to say that I have weakened their force, which I readily admit. But as their author never would consent to publish them in their original form, it would not have been a brotherly act in me to do so. Others were local and personal, and though with-

out a touch of malice, yet as they stood they might have given pain to some whom Nicolson would have been sorry to grieve. Hence lines and names and allusions have been dropped out. For all this I alone am personally responsible.

WALTER SMITH.

NOTE.

I append this note to show the kind of friends Nicolson made, who remained friends to the last, for nearly all of them who still lived stood by his grave as we lowered him into it that snowy winter day. On the occasion of his going to Kirkcudbright, he was presented with a beautiful artistic work in silver, with Celtic ornamentation, designed by the late James Drummond, R.S.A., and subscribed for, among other friends, by Dr. John Brown, Alex. Russel, Lord Neaves, Lord Ardmillan, Sir Noel Paton, Cluny Macpherson, Spencer Baynes, P. P. Alexander, Professors Blackie, Campbell Fraser, Masson, Crum Brown, J. F. M'Lennan, Sir George Harvey, Dr. Matthews Duncan, Rev. Dr. Hanna, Lord Gordon, Lord Watson, Lord Justice-Clerk Macdonald, Lords Curriehill, Lee, M'Laren, Kinnear, Kyllachy, Kincairney, Stormonth Darling, Sir W. Gibson Craig, Sir Arthur Mitchell, Sir Arch. Geikie, Lord Provost Harrison, Cosmo Innes, A. Findlater, Henry Lancaster, Æneas Mackay, David Douglas, George Barclay, Norman Macpherson, Alex. Gibson, etc.

The excellent likeness prefixed to this volume is from a photograph taken by his friend, Mr. A. P. Henderson, Glasgow.

SKYE.

My heart is yearning for thee, O Skye!
Dearest of islands!
There first the sunshine gladdened my eye,
On the sea sparkling;
There doth the dust of my dear ones lie,
In the old graveyard.

Bright are the golden and green fields to me,
Here in the Lowlands;
Sweet sings the mavis in the thorn-tree,
Snowy with fragrance:
But oh for a breath of the great North Sea,
Girdling the mountains!

Good is the smell of the brine that laves
Black rock and skerry,
Where the great palm-leaved tangle waves
Down in the green depths,
And round the craggy bluff, pierced with caves,
Seagulls are screaming.

Where the sun sinks beyond Hunish Head,
Swimming in glory,
As he goes down to his ocean bed
Studded with islands,
Flushing the Coolin with royal red,
Would I were sailing!

Many a hearth round that friendly shore
Giveth warm welcome;
Charms still are there, as in days of yore,
More than of mountains;
But hearths and faces are seen no more,
Once of the brightest.

Many a poor black cottage is there,
Grimy with peat smoke,
Sending up in the soft evening air
Purest blue incense,
While the low music of psalm and prayer
Rises to Heaven.

Kind were the voices I used to hear
Round such a fireside,
Speaking the mother tongue old and dear,
Making the heart beat
With endless tales of wonder and fear,
Or plaintive singing.

Great were the marvellous stories told
Of Ossian's heroes,
Giants, and witches, and young men bold,
Seeking adventures,
Winning kings' daughters and guarded gold
Only with valour.

Reared in those dwellings have brave ones been;
Brave ones are still there.
Forth from their darkness on Sunday I've seen
Coming pure linen,
And, like the linen, the souls were clean
Of them that wore it.

See that thou kindly use them, O man!
To whom God giveth
Stewardship over them, in thy short span,
Not for thy pleasure!
Woe be to them who choose for a clan
Four-footed people!

Blessings be with ye, both now and aye,
Dear human creatures!
Yours is the love that no gold can buy
Nor time can wither.
Peace be to thee and thy children, O Skye!
Dearest of islands!

THE BRITISH ASS.

(Roared in a Den of Scientific Lions at Edinburgh,
7th August 1871.)

AIR—*The British Grenadiers.*

SOME men go in for Science,
And some go in for Shams,
Some roar like hungry Lions,
And others bleat like Lambs:

But there's a Beast, that at this Feast
Deserves a double glass,
So let us bray, that long we may
Admire the BRITISH ASS!
Chorus—With an ASS-ASS-SOCIATION,
&c. &c.

On England's fragrant clover
This beast delights to browse,
But sometimes he's a rover
To Scotland's broomy knowes;
For there the plant supplies his want,
That doth all herbs surpass,
The Thistle rude—the sweetest food—
That feeds the BRITISH ASS!

We've read in ancient story,
How a great Chaldean swell
Came down from all his glory,
With horned beasts to dwell:
If you would know how it happened so,
That a King should feed on grass,
In "Section D, Department B,"
Inquire of the BRITISH ASS!

To Grecian sages, charming,
Rang the music of the spheres,
But voices more alarming
Salute our longer ears:

By Science bold we now are told
How Life did come to pass—
From world to world the seeds were hurled,
Whence sprung the BRITISH ASS!

In our waltzing through creation
We meet those fiery stones
That bring, for propagation,
The germs of flesh and bones:
And is it not a thrilling thought
That a huge misguided mass
Will, some fine day, come and sweep away
Our dear old BRITISH ASS!

The child who knows his father
Has aye been reckoned wise,
But some of us would rather
Be spared that sweet surprise!
If it be true, that when we view
A comely lad or lass,
We find the trace of the Monkey's face
In the gaze of the BRITISH ASS!

The Ancients, childish creatures!
Thought we derived from Heaven
The godlike form and features
To mankind only given;

But now we see our pedigree

Made plain as in a glass,

And when we grin we betray our kin[1]

To the sires of the BRITISH ASS!

Chorus—With an ASS-ASS-SOCIATION,

&c. &c.

[1] "He who rejects with scorn the belief that the shape of his own canines, and their occasional great development in other men, are due to our early progenitors having been provided with these formidable weapons, will probably reveal by sneering the line of his descent."—Darwin's *Descent of Man*, i. 127.

ADDITIONAL VERSE

(Sung at Red Lion Club, 9th August 1892).

Now three times seven years have passed
Since first was heard this song,
And here we are again at last,
The Lions Red among!
And proud are we that dwellers be
In our rocky-throned Auld Reekie,
To see in place of the highest grace
Our own good Archy Geikie!

SAM HALL.

A NEW VERSION.

I

My name it is Old Nick,
Learned Counsel!
My name it is Old Nick,
But I never learned the trick,
How with agents to get thick
Hang them all!

2

I've paced for many a year
That big Hall!
I've paced for many a year,
With a smile to hide the tear;
For the agents won't come near,
Hang them all!

3

W.S. and S.S.C.,
S.S.C.,
W.S. and S.S.C.,
They nod courteously to me,
But are slow to send a fee,
Hang them all!

4

Do they think I'm well to do,

Well to do?

Do they think I'm well to do,

From the profits of the *Ju-*

rist? Heavens, if they knew!

Hang them all!

5

What boots it to have brains,

To have brains?

What boots it to have brains,

When you find, with all your pains,

'Tis not that success that gains?

Hang them all!

6

This truth I daily see,
Daily see,
This truth I daily see,
To him that hath shall given be,
So the chance is small for me!
Hang them all!

7

I know the Sheriffs all,
Sheriffs all,
I know the Sheriffs all,
Wise and foolish, short and tall,
But from them my hopes are small,
Hang them all!

8

The Lord Advocate is kind,
He is kind,
The Lord Advocate is kind,
But somehow he doesn't mind
Any place for me to find,
He go hang!

9

There are always two or three,
Two or three,
There are always two or three
Who have stronger claims than me,
Or had uncles, it may be,
Hang them all!

10

I've done the best I could,
Best I could,
I've done the best I could
To earn my daily food,
And I say in pious mood,
Hang them all!

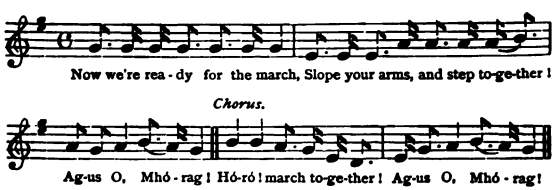
11

(P.S.—1873.)

Now I'm a county swell,
County swell,
Now I'm a county swell,
And the place it suits me well,
To be my-lorded for a spell,
Hang them all!

A HIGHLAND MARCHING SONG.

AIR—*Agus O, Mhórag.*



Now we're ready for the march,

Slope your arms, and step together !

Agus O, Mhórag !

Chorus—Hó-ró ! march together !

Agus O, Mhórag !

Keep your fours, and march in order,
Singing chorus altogether.

Lift your heads and step out proudly,
Look not down, or round about you.

He that wears the kilt should be
Erect and free as deer on heather.

When he hears the bagpipe sound,
His heart should bound like steed for battle.

Think of them who went before us,
Winning glory for the tartan!

Vainly did the mighty Roman
Check the Caledonian valour;

Still from each unconquered glen
Rose the men no yoke could fetter.[1]

With the Bruce they drew they sword,
On the gory field of Bannock.[2]

In the ranks of great Gustavus[3]
With the bravest they were reckoned.

'Neath the banners of Montrose
Like a storm-cloud swept the tartan;[4]

And when fell Dundee victorious,
On Rinrory's blood-stained heather.[5]

On the field of Fontenoy[6]
They held nobly up their banner.

[1] A.D. 79-420. [2] 24th June 1314. [3] 1629-32.
[4] 1644-46. [5] 27th July 1689. [6] 42nd, 11th May 1745.

In the steps of Royal Charlie
Many a laurel did they gather,

From the rout on Preston brae
Till the day of black Culloden :[1]

And in Fortune's darkest hour
Closer round him did they rally.

Thy green earth, Ticonderoga,
Keeps their glory fresh for ever.[2]

At Quebec their pibroch shrill
Up the hill went breathing terror.[3]

[1] 21st September 1745 to 16th April 1746.

[2] 42nd, Fraser's Highlanders (then 78th), Montgomery's Highlanders (then 77th), 7th July 1758.

[3] Fraser's Highlanders, 13th September 1759.

On the sands of Aboukír
Rang their cheer mid hail of bullets.[1]

When Sir Ralph, the good and brave,
On Iskandria's plain was stricken,

Heedless of life's ebbing tide,
He stood beside his Forty-Second.[2]

Many were their deeds of arms
'Gainst the swarms of Hyder Ali.

The grim fort of Savendroog
They refused not to adventure;

[1] 42nd, 79th, 92nd, 8th March 1801.
[2] 42nd, 79th, 92nd, 21st March 1801.

And the dizzy rock they scaled,
Which none dared before or after:[1]

Leaguered close in Mangalore,
Tippoo and his hordes they baffled:[2]

And the Sahib's cruel power
'Neath Seringa's towers they buried.[3]

First of many a field of war,
Where great Arthur ruled the battle,

Do their colours tell the tale
Of the famous fight of Assaye.[4]

[1] 71st and 72nd, 21st December 1791.
[2] 73rd, May 1783—30th January 1784.
[3] 73rd and 74th, 4th May 1799.
[4] 74th, 78th, 23rd September 1803.

So the story is of Maida,

Where the pride of France they levelled.[1]

On Corunna's bloody shore

Their onset gladdened Moore in dying;[2]

And on many a field of Spain,

To their ancient fame they added:

Talavera,[3] Fuentes d'Onor,[4]

Vittoria,[5] Salamanca![6]

[1] 78th, 4th July 1806.

[2] 42nd, 71st, 92nd, 16th January 1809.

[3] 79th, 91st, 27-28th July 1809.

[4] 42nd, 71st, 74th, 79th, 92nd, 5th May 1811.

[5] 71st, 74th, 92nd, 21st June 1813.

[6] 74th, 79th, 22nd July 1812.

Badajoz,[1] Ciudad Rodrigo,[2]

Pyrenees,[3] and San Sebastian![4]

When they crossed the Bidassoa,[5]

Still before them Soult retreated:

Nivelle[6]—Nive[7]—Orthes[8]—Toulouse[9]—

Scarce the Muse their steps can follow!

On the slopes of Quatre Bras

The Frenchmen saw them stand unbroken.

[1] 74th, 6th April 1812. [2] 19th January 1812.

[3] 42nd, 71st, 74th, 79th, 91st, 92nd, 28th July 1813.

[4] 92nd, 31st August 1813.

[5] 42nd, 71st, 74th, 79th, 91st, 92nd, 7-9th October 1813.

[6] 10th November 1813. [7] 9th December 1813

[8] 26th February 1814. [9] 10th April 1814.

On the day of Waterloo
The pibroch blew where fire was hottest.[1]

When the Alma heights were stormed,
Foremost went the Highland bonnets;[2]

And before their "thin red line"
The Cossack rider turned and vanished

When on India's burning plains
Dearly saved was Britain's honour,

Outram, Havelock, and Clyde,
Led the Highlanders to conquest.[4]

[1] 42nd, 71st, 73rd, 79th, 92nd, 16th and 18th June 1815.

[2] 42nd, 79th, 93rd, 20th September 1854.

[3] 93rd, 25th October 1854.

[4] July 1857—November 1858.

Joyful rang the pibroch loud
Through the sounding streets of Lucknow;

And, like angels sent to save,
Came the brave ones to the rescue.[1]

When Ashantee's savage lord
Loosed his dusky hordes for havoc,

Through Adansi's horrid wood[2]
In order good they led the battle;

And their stately tramp awakened
Thy forsaken streets, Coomassie![3]

[1] 78th, 25th September 1857. 42nd, 78th, 79th, 93rd, 19th March 1858.

[2] 42nd (with 135 of the 79th), 31st January 1874.

[3] 4th February 1874.

When we smote the Afghan bold,
As of old there shone the tartan:

From Cabul to Candahar,
Glorious was the march with Roberts:

Nor shall he that war who ruled,
Donald Stewart, be forgotten![1]

On Egyptian sands they bore,
Yet once more, the brunt of battle;

Rushing, with terrific cheer,
On Tel-el-Kebír resistless;[2]

[1] 72nd, 92nd, 8-13th August, 1st September 1880.

[2] 42nd, 72nd, 74th, 75th, 78th (2 companies), 79th, 13th September 1882.

As the Red Sea's mountain tide
Swept o'er Pharaoh's pride triumphant!

As it was in days of yore,
So the story shall be ever:

Where the doughtiest deeds are dared,
Shall the Gael be forward pressing:

Where the Highland broadsword waves,
There shall graves be found the thickest.

But when they have sheathed the sword,
Then their glory is to succour;

Hearts that scorn the thought of fear
Melt to tears at touch of pity;

Hands that fiercest smite in war
Have the warmest grasp for brothers;

And beneath the tartan plaid
Wife and maid find gentlest lover.

Think, then, of the name ye bear,
Ye that wear the Highland tartan!

Jealous of its old renown,
Hand it down without a blemish!

Agus O, Mhórag!
Hó-ró! march together!
Agus O, Mhórag!

[The air and leading words of the chorus are borrowed from one of the most popular songs of Alexander M'Donald (MacMhaighstir Alasdair), the Tyrtæus of the '45, in which

Prince Charlie is addressed as a beautiful golden-haired maiden named Mórag (Little Marion). The peculiar rhyme of the Gaelic (assonance—'march' and 'arms,' 'order and 'chorus,' etc.) is imitated. 'Mhórag,' pronounced *Voerak*, is the voc. case of 'Mórag,' and the three leading words of the chorus mean simply, *And O, thou little Marion!* an impassioned expression of affection towards the young Chevalier.

Pains have been taken to make this composition a correct historical summary of the chief achievements of Highland warriors, from the earliest times to their latest battle. The dates are given in chronological order, with one exception. The Regiments engaged from 1745 to 1815, and the dates, are given chiefly on the authority of General Stewart of Garth. The first edition of the song was made in 1865. It is impossible to say when it will end.]

THE ISLE OF SKYE:

AN EDINBURGH SUMMER SONG.

I

THE beautiful isles of Greece
Full many a bard hath sung;
But the isles I love best lie far in the west
Where men speak the Gaelic tongue.
Ithaca, Cyprus, and Rhodes,
Are names to the Muses dear;
But sweeter still doth Icolmkill
Fall on a Scotsman's ear.

2

Let them sing of the sunny South,
Where the blue Ægean smiles,
But give to me the Scottish sea
That breaks round the Western Isles!
Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome,
I would see them before I die,
But I'd rather not see any one of the three
Than be exiled for ever from Skye!

3

What are the wonders there,
Stranger, dost ask of me?
What is there not? I reply like a Scot,
For him who hath eyes to see.

But if you're a delicate man,
And of wetting your skin are shy,
I'd have you know, before you go,
You had better not think of Skye!

4

Lovest thou mountains great,
Peaks to the clouds that soar,
Corrie and fell where eagles dwell,
And cataracts dash evermore?
Lovest thou green grassy glades,
By the sunshine sweetly kist,
Murmuring waves, and echoing caves?
Then go to the Isle of Mist!

5

The Matterhorn's good for a fall,
If climbing you have no skill in,
But a place as good to make ravens' food
You will find upon Scoor-na-Gillian.
And there you will see at Strathaird
That Grotto of glittering spar,
With its limpid pool, where Mermaids cool
Their brows when they travel from far.

6

There frowns the dark Coruisk,
Which made the great Wizard wonder,
Even Voltaire might have worshipped there,
Methinks, in the time of thunder;

There towers the wild Cuiraing,
With its battlements grim and high,
And the mighty Storr, with its pinnacles hoar,
Standing against the sky.

7

Sail round the cliffy west,
And, rising out of the main,
You there shall see the Maidens three,
Like Choosers of the Slain;
And go wherever you may,
With a new and deep surprise,
The Coolin blue will fill your view,
And fix your gazing eyes.

8

Were I a Sovereign Prince,
Or Professor at large in vacation,
I'd build me a tower in the Isle of Skye
At the expense of the Nation;
And there like a Sea-King I'd reign,
But with a more gentle rule—
I'd harry no cattle, nor slay any man,
But I'd drive all the children to school.

9

There in the bright summer days,
Stretched on the sward I would be,
And gaze to the west on Blaven's crest,
Towering above the sea;

And I'd watch the billowing mist
Roll down his mighty side,
While up from the shore would come evermore
The music of the tide.

10

And when the sun sinks to his rest,
'Mid glory of purple and red,
There will flash the light of a thousand spears
On Blaven's cloudy head;
And each turreted ridge of black
Is lit with a flame of gold,
As they hang on high, 'twixt earth and sky,
A wondrous sight to behold!

II

Pleasant it is to be here,
With friends in company,
But I would fly to the Isle of Skye
To-morrow, if I were free!
Dunedin is queenly and fair—
None feels it more than I—
But in the prime of the summer-time,
Give me the Isle of Skye!

THE LORD PRESIDENT.

A PARLIAMENT HOUSE DITTY

AIR—*There's nae luck about the house.*

AND are you sure the news is true,
That's bruited through the town?
The JUSTICE-GENERAL, they say,
Is giving up his gown.
Is this a time to joke and laugh,
And twirl the careless heel?
'Twill be another House, methinks,
When we have lost M'NEILL!

More famous wits we may have had,
  More skilled in various lore;
And now, alas! their names are few
  On classic page that pore:
More bold expounders of the law
  Might on the Bench be seen,
But in that chair, once filled by STAIR,
  No better head hath been.

I saw him not in those great days
  Of which the ancients talk,
When giants paced the floor, where now
  They say that pigmies walk.

I saw not in its splendid prime
The glowing Celtic fire
Which, lighting up cold reason's track,
Even Saxons could admire.

I saw him only in the days
When in that highest place
He sat, a venerable form,
Which Time had touched with grace.
It seemed as if for him that seat
Had been alone ordained,
So easily, by native right
Of chieftainship, he reigned.

To his assessors on the Bench
Due deference did he pay,

Far from his nature was the pride
Of domineering sway;
To youth unskilled how kind in aid!
To weakest brethren bland;
Impatient only to the man
That vainly hid his hand.

Of eye unerring to discern
Where difficulty lay,
But never forward to object,
Or stop a speaker's way:
By nature prone to step aside
Where dubious was the ground,
If erring, erring on the side
Where safety might be found.

From mingled web of law and fact,
Who has his equal seen
To ravel out the threads of truth,
And redd the tangled skein?
No pomp of logic cleared the path
That led him to the light,
Where others toiled to prove, he saw
By gift of Second Sight.

A goodly sight it was to see
The balance of his thought,
Now swaying this way and now that,
As *pro* and *con* he brought,

And laid them in the well-poised scales,
Till, as they equal seem,
The final grains of common sense
And justice turn the beam.

No thought of shining ever moved
His large and manly mind,
That with a noble negligence
Threw showy arts behind;
Yet none in few and fitting words
Choice thoughts could better clothe;
Loving the substance more than form,
He won and mastered both.

Then fare thee well, Lord President!
With honour, as with years,

Thou goest crowned, to take thy place
Of right with Britain's Peers.
Our hearts attend thee from this House,
And come what changes may,
We'll ne'er forget, nor see the like
Of BARON COLONSAY!

From the Reporters' Box, First Division, February 1867.

ARDMILLAN, 1871.

THREE summer days, with full content,
Among Ardmillan's braes I spent;
Four nights, within its sheltered keep,
The ocean's murmur sooth'd my sleep:
And often still, in quiet hours,
I think upon Ardmillan's bowers,
O'erhung by wooded slopes that lie
'Neath grassy ridges, stretching high.
Sheltered by many an ancient tree,
The ancient house stands pleasantly.

It looks across the western brine,
And sees the light of morning shine
Where Ailsa, towering from the deep,
Upheaves on high her forehead steep.
Its turrets catch the golden fire
When sinks the sun beyond Kintyre,
And wide the shifting glories spread
Their deepening hues of royal red
Where, farther north, in outline grand,
The peaks of Arran face the land
To which poetic fancy turns
With deepest love, the land of Burns!
How pleasant, on the breezy height,
To watch the great sea gleaming bright,
With light and shade in endless chase
Careering o'er the azure space;

While stately ships pass to and fro
Like ocean birds on wings of snow,
And from the beach comes measur'd roar
Of billows breaking on the shore!
Beneath those hospitable towers
How peaceful glide the summer hours!
Sweet odours float on breath of balm,
And all around is bright and calm:
From the deep umbrage of the trees
Come voice of birds and hum of bees,
While human voices, sweeter still,
The air with pleasant music fill.
O happy home of kindness warm,
Thine are the secret and the charm
That makes it sunshine all the year
To him who finds a welcome here!

Though clouds o'ercast the outer sky,
Love's halcyon light and beaming eye
Reign round the warm and cheerful hearth
Where pristine piety and worth
Keep bright and pure the fire of life,
Despite the world, and worldly strife.
Here mellow wisdom's ample store
Is graced with wealth of letter'd lore,
And Milton's self might here have found
Congenial home, on Scottish ground,
For the high Muse that, holding dear
Castalia's fount of waters clear,
Delighted more in Sion hill,
And purl of Kedron's holy rill.

THE LAY OF THE NEW LORD

OR

THE LORD KNOWS WHO.

AIR—*The Laird of Cockpen.*

PART FIRST.

I

WHEN worthy old Manor passed gently away,
Oppressed with the work and the cares of the day,
The question arose, who should sit in his chair,
The Outer House burden and glory to share.

2

That House, to our sorrow, at present contains
But one man whom Heaven has gifted with brains,
And therefore the question is pressing and grave,
Who now shall go in there, our credit to save.

3

There's Gifford the long-haired, with beak like a bird,
Whose talk on the platform is often absurd,
But a lawyer well furnished and able is he,
And an excellent judge, without doubt, he would be.

4

There's Donald the jaunty, so tall and so trim,
With knowledge so boundless—no doubt about him!
When he pleads, one may sometimes exclaim, "What a cure!"
But no one would grudge him the place, I am sure.

5

There's learned Patrick Fraser, least blate among men,
Who has done much hard work, both with tongue and with pen.
He sticks not at trifles, and is not refined,
But one claim he *has* got, and that is a mind.

6

There's wee Archie Davidson, solemn of jowl,
As prim as a sparrow, as wise as an owl,
A nephew of Cockburn he chanced to be born,
And therefore predestined the Bench to adorn.

7

One yet is to mention, the great little Shand,
So pawky and clever, so nice and so bland;
He hopes in due time to become a Q.C.,
So pray do not shelve him just yet for a wee.

8

There are others, it's said, but let them understand
That a line must be drawn, and we draw it at Shand.
So if any one knocks, we must show him the door,
Were he sheriff, or seraph, a hundred times o'er.

Part Second.

1

Now a month had gone past, and no mortal could say
Which of these learned horses would carry the day;
With riches embarrassed, Lord Advocate Young
Cannot settle the matter, and so holds his tongue.

2

One morning our Donald was radiant to see,
And all of us thought 'twas a *fait accompli*,
But ere evening the rumour was voted untrue,
For Donald, for once in his lifetime, looked blue.

3

The next day bold Patrick so sweetly did smile,
That the hopes of his backers went up for a while;
But the pleasing delusion soon passed, and was o'er,
And Patrick paced heavily on as before.

4

Last Tuesday wee Davidson strode through the hall,
From the Advocate's Chambers, so pompous and tall,
That every one said, he was sure of the gown,
But on Friday they doubted, so deep was his frown.

5

And so, four whole weeks, does the mystery brood,
Supplying the guessers and betters with food,
While Crichton and Thoms, on the rack all the while,
Though nearly demented, are trying to smile.

6

Now isn't it truly a glorious state
That our wealth in fit men for the Bench is s
great,
A month we require, and can freely afford,
To make up our mind on a Junior Lord.

7

Some, puzzled, the horrible rumour let fall,
That nobody's going to be judge after all;
M'Lennan may like that, but so do not I,
By the beard of Belhaven, I hope it's a lie!

8

Then long live the Queen and her Councillor Bruce,
Whom Tories profanely denounce as a goose;
And whatever he gives us, we will not refuse,
There's as bad on the Bench as the worst he can
choose.

HYMN BY ST. COLUMBA.

[MR. SKENE, in Vol. II. of his *Celtic Scotland*, p. 91, describing the scenery of Iona, says:—"On the highest point, overlooking the expanse of the western sea, is the cairn called *Cul-ri-Erin*, which marks the spot where Columba is said to have ascended for the purpose of ascertaining if he could discern from it the distant shores of his beloved Erin. Among the poems attributed to him, there is one which so remarkably describes the scene from this spot, and the emotions it was calculated to excite in one of his temperament, that it is hardly possible to avoid the conclusion that it contains the genuine expression of his feelings." The original of this very interesting poem is among the Irish MSS. in the Royal Library at Brussels,[1] the keeper of which, M. Alen, kindly supplied the copy from which the text is given. It has had the advantage of being collated by the learned Dean of Armagh with another copy, made by the late Professor O'Curry, whose admirably faithful translation is given by Mr. Skene. The words of that translation have been adopted

[1] Burgund. MSS. No. 5100, pp. 34, 35.

in this version in many cases, with very little alteration. For the accuracy of the text of the original, the present translator is indebted to Dr. Reeves and Mr. Skene, with whom it is an honour for any Celtic student to be associated in the humblest way. Of the beauty of the original it is unnecessary to say anything for those who can appreciate it.—A. N.]

1

SWEET is to me in *Uchd Aluinn*,[1]
On a peaked crag to be,
That I might often behold
The face of the boundless sea.

2

To look on the heaving waves,
While in their Father's ear
Music for ever they chant,
Hymning the world's career.

[1] *Lovely Breast.* The rocky heights on the south-west of Iona are called *Uchdáchan* at this day.

3

The level and star-bright strand
No sorrow it were to see,
And to hear the wondrous birds,
Sailing on happily.

4

The thunder of crowding waves
To hear on the rocky shore,
And down by the church to hear
The sounding surges roar.

5

To see the swift-flying flocks
Over the watery plain,
And, greatest of wonders all,
The monsters of the main.

6

To see the ebb and the flood
In power upon the sea,
And *Cul-ri-Erin*[1] there, I say,
My secret name would be.

7

And grief would come to my heart,
While gazing to her shore,
And all the many ills I've done
I weeping would deplore.

8

The Godhead then would I bless,
Him who doth all things keep,
Heaven with its orders bright untold,
And earth and shore and deep.

[1] *Back turned to Ireland*—Erin no more!

9

I would search in all the books
That good to my soul would bring,
Now to beloved Heaven I'd kneel,
And now a Psalm I'd sing.

10

Heaven's high one, the holy Chief,
My thoughts would now employ,
Anon, to work without constraint
Would be to me a joy.

11

Dulse from the rocks I would pluck,
At times I'd fishing go,
At times I would feed the poor,
Now in the cell bend low.

12

Best counsel in the sight of God
To me there hath been given,
From error He shall keep me free,
My King, the Lord of Heaven!

A LAY OF KIRKCUBREE.

(Sung at the Reporters' Dinner, Queensferry, 20th July 1877.)

AIR—*The Twa Corbies.*

1

IF you desire a merry lay
Then ask it not of me, I pray;
My harp hangs on a willow tree
Beside the banks of southern Dee.

2

My thoughts are not of anything
So light as framing rhymes to sing,
Both day and night, instead of songs,
I muse intent on rights and wrongs.

3

I now sit in the curule chair
Once filled by him so good and fair,
Whose charms, like Phœbus ever young,
By Glassford Bell were fitly sung.

4

I wonder not that Bell did grieve,
And scarcely could the truth believe,
That such a swell should banished be
To live and die in Kirkcubree.

5

For though it be a bonnie town,
An ancient burg, of good renown,
No Rip Van Winkle yet am I,
Contented there asleep to lie.

6

But yet let no one think it strange
That human life brings many a change,
A man from duns to keep him free
Might choose to live in Kirkcubree.

7

If man's chief end were vegetation,
No better place is in creation,
Quiet Peebles' self can scarce compare
With Cuthbert's Kirk for dreamful air.

8

Yet higher ends appear to me
Than that my bulk increased should be,
Even sensual pleasures I have seen
More sweet than cups with Whisky Jean.

9

If you desire the truth to know
How I to such a place did go,
And leave the well-beloved town,
Of Scotland's pride the stately crown,

10

That truth I freely will confess,
'Twas S.S.C. and W.S.
Yes! W.S. and S.S.C.
Too small attention paid to me.

11

Perhaps the fellows thought also
That I for them no love did show,
Because my choice of company
Has never been an S.S.C.

12

Some others thought, so I was told,
That I was not in want of gold;
They held me for a Highland laird,
Who not a pin for cases cared!

13

For such mistakes their eyes I blame,
And yet forgive them all the same;
My ancient namesake will take care
That each to his due place shall fare.

14

Now do not think, my brothers dear,
That life for me has lost its cheer,
I still am game for six score mile,
With you an evening to beguile.

15

And many a day I hope to see,
To meet the sons of *S.* and *D.*[1]
Whom Rettie rules with anxious care,
So luck betide them ever mair!

[1] Shaw and Dunlop's Reports.

TO PROFESSOR BLACKIE, ON HIS RETURN FROM EGYPT.

(Sung at the Festival of the B.B., 27th December 1878.)

AIR—*Donald Caird's come again.*

I

BLACKIE to the East has been,
Memnon and the Sphinx has seen,
Up the waters of the Nile
He has sweated many a mile,
Seeing with believing eyes
Plague of dust and plague of flies,

Deaved by blackies nude as frogs,

Shouting beggars, howling dogs!

Chorus—Now his troubles all are o'er,

Welcome to the Professor!

Tell the news in brugh and glen,

Blackie he is come agen!

2

Did you ever hear his hymn

On the land of Mizraim?

Chanting with a Gaelic chorus

To Osiris, Ra, and Horus!

Thoughts of heather all the while

Cheered him on the muddy Nile;

Never fainer man than he
Stood again on Oban quay.
Chorus—To the land of heath and ben
He is welcome back agen! etc.

3

Many were his lively jinks
In the country of the Sphinx,
Natives he astonished there,
Copt and Moslem he gar'd stare;
Quick of Arabs he got rid,
Climbing Cheops' Pyramid,
And when on the top he sprung,
"Scots wha hae," with birr he sung.
Chorus—To the land of Bruce and Burns
Very welcome he returns! etc.

4

Here we have him back once more,
Laden with Egyptian lore,
More he kens now, doubt it not,
Than was known to Herodot,
Secrets hidden in the tongue
That was guessed at first by Young,
Making known by pictured things
Doughty deeds of thick-lipped kings.
Chorus—Yes, of secrets known to few
Blackie knows a thing or two! etc.

5

Blackie can do anything,
Sermon preach, or ballad sing,

Write a book, or climb a peak,
Chat in Gaelic, or in Greek;
Ever learning something new,
Holding fast the good and true,
What he trows he tells right free,
'Αληθεύων ἐν ἀγάπῃ!

Chorus—Blackie he is here agen,
Ready aye with tongue or pen!

6

While men love the Gaelic tongue
Ever shall his praise be sung,
More than all their chiefs had done,
Blackie for the Gael has won;

Now the Celtic Muse shall be
Set in place of high degree,
Where the light of lore doth beam
In King James' Academe!
Chorus—Let the land of Duncan Bain
Echo to the cheerful strain! etc.

7

Now with spirits full of glee
Blackie in his place we see,
Scotland when he was away
Seemed more empty than to-day:
Let the times be e'er so sad,
Let the world go e'er so mad,

Pious thanks and cheerful mood
Well become this Brotherhood!

Chorus—Sing then, ye unworldly men,
Blackie he is come agen,
Tell the news in brugh and glen,
Blackie he is come agen!

SONG FOR THE NORTHERN LIGHTS DINNER.

2ND FEBRUARY 1872.

AIR—*A wet Sheet and a flowing Sea.*

I

O WOULD that I a Sheriff were !
I heard a young man sigh,
O might I but a Sheriff be,
A happy man were I !
My pockets should be lined with gold,
Which now are bare of tin,
My cheeks should wear health's ruddy glow,
Which now are gaunt and thin.

2

O if I were the Sheriff of
A county by the sea,
I would not envy any man,
However high he be;
I do not mean a Substitute,
Far higher I aspire;
A Sheriff-Depute's place is that
Which stirs my bosom's fire.

3

The office of a Sheriff is
A good thing in itself,
It bringeth power and dignity,
And a moderate share of pelf;

But ever to my fancy still,
The best of all his rights,
Is that he shines, with steady ray,
Among the Northern Lights!

4

'Tis pleasant, for a single night
Among those lights to shine;
But oh! to be a fixéd star,
I would that lot were mine!
I'd barter all the hope I have
Lord President to be;
If only I could be made sure,
Of a county by the sea!

5

How joyous on the *Pharos'* deck,
In charge of Captain Graham,
In Public Safety's [1] noble cause
To dare the "saut sea faem"!
In such a ship, in such a cause,
It's happy I should be
To visit every blessed light
That guards the Scottish Sea!

6

Right gladly for the public weal
I'd visit Skerryvore,
Where the wondrous work of Stevenson
Defies the Atlantic roar!

[1] *In salutem omnium* is the motto of the Northern Lights Commissioners.

And be the weather what it might,
Of sea, or wind, or rain;
The black Dubh Hirteach I should hail,
Out in the lonely main!

7

To Barra Head I fain would go,
And climb the dizzy height
Where o'er the cliffs of Berneray
Doth flash the far-seen light.[1]
Then on to Heisker I should go,
And eke to Scalpay's Isle;
And to see the Butt of Lewis light
I'd travel many a mile.

[1] This light is seen at 32 miles, the farthest distance at which any of the 60 Northern Lights is visible. Cape Wrath, 30 miles, comes next.

8

From thence to Ronay I should cross,
And the time would not seem long
That was spent about the shores of Skye,
Fit theme for poet's song!
To wild Cape Wrath I then should steer,
Washed by the Arctic wave;
And eastward on by Dunnet Head,
Where the Pentland waters rave.

9

In Orkney and in Shetland isles
To me it would be joy
To visit every light that shines
'Twixt farthest Unst and Hoy.

O why did perverse fate to Thoms
That Island realm assign?
I like Thoms well, but truth to tell,
I would his berth were mine!

10

Thus sang the fond and foolish Bard,
And breathed his wishes vain,
As well he may try the Minch to dry
As hope such prize to gain!
But blame him not, ye Northern Lights,
For happy still is he
At your bright board, with good things stored,
A welcome guest to be!

THE HEATHER.

A REVERIE.

O SWEET is the breath of the heather
On braes of the Highlands that blows,
O rich is its bloom when at evening
The hills glow in purple and rose!

I sit on the slopes of Loch Etive,
The heather is up to my knee,
I look to the west, where the islands
Arise from the far-gleaming sea.

The peak of the mighty Ben Cruachan
  Above me soars up in the mist,
Below, by the waters of Etive,
  The feet of the proud one are kist.

I see the grey strength of Dunstaffnage
  Keeping ward on the way of the seas,
And faintly the roaring of Connal
  Is heard in the lull of the breeze.

Here, lapped in the stillness of Nature,
  Afar from the dwellings of men,
My spirit is rapt by the magic
  That breathes over mountain and glen.

Around are the footprints of Fingal,
And Ossian, the last of his race;
Here Dermid and Oscar and Fillan
Have wakened the storm of the chase.

O voices of heroes long vanished,
Ye live, overcoming the tomb,
While lingers the music of Ossian
Round hills where the heather doth bloom!

Where glances the light on the waters
That dash betwixt Mull and Lismore,
The long-ships of Hako went flashing,
The Raven to battle that bore.

O valiant offspring of Odin!
The drop of your blood that's in me
Still fires at the thought of the prowess
That made you the kings of the sea.

Beneath yonder slope good King Robert,
When the brooch from his shoulder was torn,
Cut his way through the pass which he redden'd
With the blood of the clansmen of Lorn.

O conquering sword of King Robert!
How good to have followed with thee,
To strike a strong blow for old Scotland,
The day that she rose to be free!

The wind from the heights of Glen Etive
Comes laden with voices of woe—
'Tis the dirge that for ever and ever
Is borne from the depths of Glencoe.

O ghosts of the brave Clan MacIan!
Still yours is that terrible glen,
Once blithe with the voices of children,
The gladness of women and men.

I think of the days of Prince Charlie,
When the North spent its valour in vain,
And the blood of the brave and the loyal
Was poured at Culloden like rain.

Now past like the mist on the mountains
Are the days when such deeds could be done;
The clansmen are scattered for ever,
The race of the chieftains is run.

And gone are the green-coated Fairies
That brightened the hillside of old,
The witches that rode on the tempest,
The Gruagach [1] that haunted the fold.

And past are the sights dread and solemn
Vouchsafed to the eye of the seer,
The lights, and the sounds, and the phantoms,
That filled every clachan with fear.

[1] A long-haired friendly sprite, of the Brownie species, but female.

The life of the days that have fleeted
Comes back not with vision or spell;
So rest ye, dim shadows of cloudland—
Ye Fairies, for ever farewell!

O thoughts of the past! ye bring sadness,
And vain is the wish that once more
The great grassy glens that are silent
Were homes of the brave as of yore.

Sleep, brave ones and bards that have perished,
And green be your places of rest,
And light be the winds that go sighing
O'er the children whom Nature loved best.

The soft dewy steps of the gloaming
Are climbing the sides of the Ben,
The last flush of light crowns with glory
The Herdman [1] that watches the glen.

Here, wrapped in my plaid in the heather,
I envy no monarch his bed.
Come, dreams of the hills and the Highlands,
And visit in slumber my head.

[1] Buachaill Etive, the principal mountain at the head of the glen.

THE RUSH TO THE BAR.

A Song for a Recent Faculty Dinner.

By an Examinator.

Air—*The Low-Backed Car.*

I

Now listen, and I'll sing you
Some light and artless rhymes;
We need such lays, our hearts to raise,
In these distressful times.

The song that I will sing you
Is not of deeds of war,
But about the lads, that come in squads,
To join the Scottish Bar.

Chorus—To enter the ranks of the Bar,
They are flocking from near and far!
I think they are mad, but still I am glad
That there should be such faith in the Bar.

2

No year that we remember,
Such a crop of them has seen;
There have passed, since last December,
Not less than SEVENTEEN!

And *Eight* have paid their entrance fees,
Who'll pass, no doubt, next year,
To walk the boards, and increase the hoards
The widows' souls that cheer.
Chorus—Such a rush as there is to the Bar,
In spite of hard times and war!
Their wigs when they don, I hope they'll get on,
And be pleased that they came to the Bar.

3

To us behind the scenes here
The sight seems rather strange,
For trade is slack, though there's no lack
Of movement and of change;

Our prizes are not many,
And when a chance we see,
The question now seems always how
The post may abolished be!
Chorus—But yet they come on to the Bar,
Each hoping to prove a star,
The places to fill, that are vacant still,
Of the former great lights of the Bar.

4

To the learned Examinators
You'll justice do, I'm sure,
Their work has been, as you may ween,
This year no sinecure.

'Tis reckoned a proof of vigour
To yield at a birth two or more,
But what will you say, when in one day
Our Faculty brought forth FOUR!
Chorus—Thus we keep up the life of the Bar,
And from dread of extinction are far!
While promising boys come to add to our joys,
And share in the luck of the Bar.

5

Then pledge the bold young jurists
Who have joined our ranks this year,
Their healths we'll drink, whatever we think
Of the folly that brings them here!

I hope they have private fortunes,
To furnish the sinews of war;
If not, let us pray, they never may say,
"We were daft when we thought of the Bar."

Chorus—So let them come on to the Bar,
Things can scarcely be worse than they are!
Here's success to the lads, who are coming in squads,
To prove that there's life in the Bar!

23rd December 1870.

AT KYLE RHEA.

27TH JUNE 1878.

[During the severe thunderstorm which raged in Skye last week, a fatal occurrence took place. The people living at a house at Kyle Rhea were conducting family worship during the prevalence of the storm on Thursday night, and on rising from their kneeling posture they discovered the sad fact that one of their number, a girl of fifteen years of age, was quite dead, having been evidently struck by lightning.—*Scotsman*, 2nd July 1878.]

IT was a lowly cottage,
On the shore of the Misty Isle,
Where towers dark Beinn-na-Caillich
Above the rushing Kyle.

It was the height of summer,
At the close of a long June day,
When the good man "took the books,"
For the hour had come to pray.

Without were elements warring,
Within was peace and calm;
'Mid roar of rain and thunder,
Arose the plaintive psalm.

The chapter was read, unhurried,
'Mid lightning's lurid glare,
And round about that trustful hearth
They all knelt down to prayer.

The dusky place was lighted,
By another awful flash;
And loud above the father's voice,
Was heard the thunder's crash.

Duly the prayer was uttered,
While rolled the solemn peal;
Then all uprose but Annie—
And still did Annie kneel.

"Sleepest thou, Annie, dear one?"
Is said, with gentle shake:
Yes! Annie sleeps full soundly,
Never on earth to wake.

By the lowly hearth, so hallowed,
Hath swept the Angel's car,
That wafted the great Elijah
From sorrowing eyes afar.

Break not thy heart, O mother!
'Tis well with the child of thy love;
She will worship still when you worship,
But among the saints above!

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